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Let's Talk Broadband

Welcome to the winter issue of *Let's Talk Broadband*, featuring interviews with Senator Ben Hueso and Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia and a new broadband survey. *Let's Talk Broadband* is published by the California Emerging Technology Fund ([CETF](#)), a statewide non-profit established at the direction of the California Public Utilities Commission. The mission of CETF is to close the Digital Divide in California by promoting and accelerating broadband deployment and adoption.

Local Government Survey on Broadband Policy

Following on its [2016 Annual Survey on Broadband Adoption in California](#), CETF reached out to County, City and School District officials in October to better understand their views on broadband. The survey found that 77% of California government official respondents view high-speed Internet as "very important to the future economic prosperity and quality of life in their jurisdiction."

Among the 250-plus respondents to the survey, 60% were elected officials and 50% represented rural communities—areas where the California Public Utilities Commission estimated per an [April 2016 report](#) that only 43% of rural households have access to reliable broadband service.

Other findings in the [CETF 2016 Survey of Local Government Officials](#) included:

- 73% report broadband is very important to their jurisdictions' small and large businesses
- 53% report their low-income residents are not connected at home to broadband
- 63% report broadband is a very important issue to residents
- 57% report that schools are very able to provide computing devices and broadband in classrooms
- 22% report that schools always allow students to take home computing devices to do homework
- 65% report their jurisdiction would benefit greatly from telehealth-telemedicine technology and capabilities
- 78% report broadband availability and speed are neither very high nor very low
- 71% report their jurisdiction is fairly advanced in providing information and services online
- 71% report their jurisdiction uses electronic communications quite often to reach residents
- 55% report their workforce is prepared to use computing and Internet navigation skills to fill available jobs
- 36% report that broadband is very adequate for public safety and emergency responses

Timothy Stearns, Mt. Shasta City Council Member (Siskiyou County), commented in the survey: "The State should provide matching funds to enable rural California cities to provide to residents, businesses, healthcare providers, schools, libraries and public safety providers Internet speeds comparable to what is available in metropolitan cities throughout this nation."

Judy Morris, Trinity County Board of Supervisors Member, commented in the survey: "Please do not let rural California fall further behind in educational, health and economic development opportunities."

demand which our jurisdiction can't fill due to capital costs. We need a regional JPA to acquire and administer a fiber optic network for all our residents."

Alan Peterson, Merced Union High School District Superintendent (Merced County), commented in the survey: "We need to provide Internet to all of our students so they can overcome social and geographical boundaries."

Lee Adams, Sierra County Board of Supervisors Member, commented in the survey: "Every home in California with electricity should have broadband."

The Local Government Survey confirms the need for [Internet For All Now Act](#) and continued funding of the California Advanced Services Fund. CETF is grateful for the leadership of Senator Ben Hueso and Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia in highlighting the imperative to close the Digital Divide in California. Please read their interviews below.

Sincerely,



Sunne Wright McPeak, President and CEO
California Emerging Technology Fund

Creating Equity Through Broadband: An Interview with Senator Ben Hueso



Ben Hueso was elected California State Senator for the 40th District in March 2013, and represents the cities of Imperial Beach, Chula Vista, National City and portions of the City of San Diego and Imperial County. In January 2015, he was appointed Chair of the Senate Committee on Energy, Utilities and Communications—a position he has used, along with his role on the California Broadband Council, to advocate for greater broadband access and adoption for low-income Californians.

Senator Hueso is a champion of the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF), which since 2008 has enabled crucial Internet infrastructure throughout California, connecting more than 300,000 households to the digital economy. Most recently, he authored S.B. 745, which was signed by Governor Jerry Brown in September 2016 and changes how California studies statewide broadband adoption and funds projects to connect public housing developments to the Internet passed. CETF sat down with Senator Hueso to learn more about his efforts to close the Digital Divide and provide affordable and accessible Internet for all Californians.

Why is broadband important in your district?

It is critical that our children can excel academically and our families can lead more productive lives through technology access and resources.

Why is broadband an economic development issue for your district and the state of California?

homework, opportunities for employment, connecting our small businesses to the global economy, access to government programs and resources.

How have schools and libraries in your district benefited from broadband Internet access?

Our goal is for children to thrive and grow academically and have access to technology and resources, which they may not have at home. Having broadband in the classroom and in libraries gives our youth the opportunity to excel by working with programs and software that can improve their understanding of important topics and subjects.

What areas in your district have the lowest broadband adoption rates and why?

Some of the lowest adoption rates generally tend to be low-income residents who can't afford monthly service. There are many great programs by providers that offer low rates and services to eligible families with school-aged children, but we need to get the word out and help our residents enroll.

What would you like to see the Legislature do to improve broadband access and adoption in your district?

One of my intentions as Chair of the Senate Committee on Energy, Utilities and Communications will be to ensure our programs help address the Digital Divide and leverage each other to ensure we are being efficient and effective with these funds, including ensuring state programs are aligned and compliment federal efforts. For example, the federal government has already adopted a decision to move towards subsidizing service for eligible low-income residents. I have authored Senate Bill 745 to help bridge the digital divide in California, which is now on the Governor's desk awaiting his signature. This critical measure would extend funding for broadband infrastructure in public housing buildings and improve accountability and the reporting of existing programs by the California Public Utilities Commission. We need to help residents in public housing take advantage of broadband service once the FCC has issued the specific rules.

The Broadband Benefit: An Interview with Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia



In November 2014, Eduardo Garcia was elected to represent California's 56th Assembly District and, in just two years, has authored or supported 16 bills and resolutions signed by Governor Jerry Brown. Assemblyman Garcia has focused on measures that bring environmental and economic relief to his native Coachella and Imperial Valleys as well as on workforce training and financial assistance to small businesses in his district. As a member of the Assembly Committee on Utilities and Commerce, he has been an advocate for affordable broadband and equitable Internet access, helping to close the homework gap and the Digital

for K-12 schools. CETF interviewed Assemblyman Garcia to learn more about his views on broadband access, adoption and policy.

Why is broadband important to your district?

Our district has tremendous potential for growth and development, which could be significantly aided by high-speed Internet access and adoption. In eastern Riverside County and Imperial County, we have a high-unemployed population, so broadband investments would bring much needed opportunities for education, job skills, job growth and small business development. We also have an emerging, growing, predominantly Latino population, and access to the World Wide Web—with all the information and opportunities that come with it—is imperative to connect our people to the state and the world.

What are the challenges for broadband access and adoption in your district?

The challenges we face are not unique to our district. They stem from the slow pace of growth in our region as it relates to infrastructure investments of several kinds. This means when we are engaged in local planning—whether it's in relation to water, sewers, building roads, park and libraries—we also need to think about broadband infrastructure. In Coachella, when I was mayor, we worked with Time Warner to wire our parks. We also came up with quick, efficient ways to synchronize traffic using broadband. We have turned school buses into hotspots, where children can do their homework online. We have had to be very innovative with broadband infrastructure because of our geographic, rural location. But geography is not our only challenge. There is also the lack of direct investment from the private and public sectors.

Where are the biggest challenges for broadband access and adoption in your district?

For the schools, there is a capacity challenge. For the community, there is a connectivity challenge. We now have a 1-1 iPad initiative in the schools, but that initiative has led to a broadband capacity challenge in the school buildings. The challenge now is for government agencies and the Internet service companies to see the benefit of investing more in broadband infrastructure and getting more people in our communities online. As our population grows, it's not enough to have a computer. People need a computer connected to broadband and they need digital literacy skills for navigating the many opportunities that are available online.

What would you like to see the Legislature do to improve broadband access and adoption?

I would like the Legislature to prioritize broadband access to economically distressed communities that have high levels of poverty and unemployment. The entire state of California will benefit if these communities get the broadband investment they need to take advantage of our digital economy.

To learn more about the Internet For All Now Act:
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